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Binaural-beat CDs, apps a different way to relax

LIVE WELL

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Care to entrain your brain?

Binaural-beat CDs claim to do just that, which can provide a number of benefits, such as entering meditative states easily and quickly, stress reduction, pain management, increased creativity, intuition and concentration.

The Hemi-Sync CDs caught my eye earlier this year. I bought the one labeled "Ascension." The cover stated the intended effect of the 45-minute CD was to: "Access an exquisite state of mental calm and expanded awareness with Ascension and commune with higher aspects of self."

The Hemi-Sync CDs were developed by Robert Monroe, of the Monroe Institute in Virginia. His passion was exploring trancelike states of being.

Binaural-beat CDs contain embedded beats of differing sound frequencies overlaid with music and, on some CDs, verbal guidance. Each ear receives a different beat, so headphones are recommended.

The frequencies used must not be over 1,000 Hz and the difference between the two cannot be more than 30 Hz for the desired effects to take place.

For example, if one ear receives a frequency of 290 Hz and the other 300 Hz, the brain perceives the difference, 10 Hz, in pulsating beats. The brain then responds by entraining its brain-waves to that 10 Hz frequency.

The frequency range of the alpha brainwave is 7-13 Hz. If that perceived frequency falls to 4-7 Hz, that induces a theta state.

Why is that important?

Most of us spend our days running on beta waves, about 13-39 Hz. We're alert, active, busy, thinking and concentrating.

Entraining the brain into an alpha state induces a much more relaxed state in us. We're still awake, but with much less stress and

active thought. It's similar to the pre-sleep and pre-wake drowsy state.

When the brain drops into the theta state, we're in deep meditation or deep REM sleep, which means lots of dreams and those flickering eyelids we've all seen in deep sleepers. Delta waves, less than 4 Hz, are associated with deep, dreamless sleep and loss of body awareness.

It is suggested to begin with a frequency near the state you are already in, and go from there.

The frequency of beats depends on what you're seeking to accomplish. Binaural beats in the delta range can help insomniacs. Those with theta beats are thought to help increase learning.

What does it sound like?

The "Ascension" CD was alive with bolts of thunder and rain, the sound of a crashing surf and ethereal keyboards mixed with organlike sounds.

I've used it off and on, listening for 30 minutes or more. On some days, it sounds merely like pretty music amid a giant storm that's pleasant to listen to and relaxing.

On other days, there is definitely something to the subtle beats that feels very transporting. I close my eyes and next thing you know, a half-hour has gone by.

I found the Hemi-Sync CDs at Celebration Conscious Living Store, 2209 W. Colorado Ave. They vary in price, most in the $15-$20 range.

Just so you know: There are even iPhone apps with binaural beats, for example "Sleep Machine," "Mountain Stream," "Remote Viewing" and "Past Life Regression."